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Blue Marlin and Tuna at Grave Risk, Group Warns

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Some of the mightiest fish in the sea, including the blue marlin and five of the eight species of [tuna](#), are facing serious threats, the International Union for Conservation of Nature [warned](#) on Thursday.

The organization, which groups more than 1,000 government and nongovernmental member organizations around the world, made the pronouncement in advance of the third joint meeting of the Tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organizations, to be held next week in La Jolla, Calif.

Jean-Christophe Vié, deputy director of the I.U.C.N.'s global species program, called on regulators to act quickly. "There is an urgent need for effective management," he said. "Scientific findings should not be discarded in order to maintain short-term profit. Marine life and jobs for future generations are both at stake."

In its first assessment of the family of Scombridae, which includes the billfishes, tunas, mackerels and bonitos, the organization said that seven of the 61 members of the family faced a serious risk of extinction. Four other species were listed as "near threatened," while two-thirds were classified in the lowest-risk category.

The southern bluefin (*Thunnus maccoyii*) was listed as "critically endangered," while the Atlantic bluefin (*T. thynnus*), the focus of one of the highest-profile ocean conservation efforts now under way, was listed simply as "endangered." The bigeye tuna (*T. obesus*) was listed as "vulnerable," while the yellowfin (*T. albacares*) is classified as "threatened." Albacore (*T. alalunga*) was classified as "near threatened."

"All three bluefin tuna species are susceptible to collapse under continued excessive fishing pressure," Kent Carpenter, a professor at Old Dominion University and an author of the paper, said in a statement. "The southern bluefin has already essentially crashed, with little hope of recovery."

As for the western Atlantic bluefin, “stocks are at risk of collapse as they are showing little sign that the population is rebuilding following a significant reduction in the 1970s,” he said.

The I.U.C.N. found three species of billfish to be endangered. The blue marlin (*Makaira nigricans*) and white marlin (*Kajikia albida*) were classified as “vulnerable,” and the striped marlin (*Kajikia audax*) as “near threatened.”

Marlins are among the world’s most prized blue-water game fish, growing to hundreds of pounds. Their increasing scarcity has led many anglers to practice catch-and-release fishing. The International Game Fish Association and the U.S. National Coalition for Marine Conservation have been running a campaign to “Take Marlin off the Menu” in the hope of ending the commercial harvest and trade in marlin, sailfish and spearfish.

The I.U.C.N. said the key to recovery of the fish stocks was to reduce commercial pressure by reducing the catch to “well below” the maximum sustainable yield, the level above which the fish cannot reproduce rapidly enough to maintain a constant biomass. It pointed to hopes that the eastern population of the Atlantic bluefin tuna would recover thanks to official catch reductions of almost 75 percent in recent years, saying that this was a model for recovery.

As top-level predators, the scombrids, many of which rank among the most commercially valuable fish in the seas, take longer to mature than short-lived species and recover more slowly from population declines.

“These results are yet another warning light that some species of tunas are dangerously over-exploited and others may be heading in that direction,” Susan Lieberman, director of International Policy for the Pew Environment Group.

“The study reinforces what marine conservationists have known for decades — that there are negative consequences to poor fisheries management,” she said. “Around the world, tuna stocks are in serious decline — with too many boats chasing too few fish, along with widespread illegal fishing in several ocean areas.”